

LIGHTSHIP NO. 83
(LV 83
WAL 508
Lightship BLUNTS
Lightship SAN FRANCISCO
Lightship RELIEF
SWIFTSURE)
South Lake Union Pier
Seattle
King County
Washington

HAER No. WA-175

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

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HAER No. WA-175

LOCATION: South Lake Union Pier, Seattle, King County, Washington

RIG/TYPE OF CRAFT: Lightship

OFFICIAL NUMBERS: LV 83, WAL 508

PRINCIPAL
DIMENSIONS: Length: 129' (112' as built in 1904)
Beam: 28'-6"
Depth: 12'-6"

DATE OF
CONSTRUCTION: 1904

DESIGNER: United States Office of the Light-House Board, C.J. Hutchins,
Capt. U.S.N. Naval Secretary

BUILDER: New York Shipbuilding Company, Camden, New Jersey

SIGNIFICANCE: Lightship No. 83 is one of three surviving lightships and "the oldest on the West Coast." Of the three surviving lightships, "only No. 83 has retained her original marine steam engine and machinery, and hence is not only one of the oldest surviving American lightships, but also the lightship with the greatest integrity of design and form."¹

PROJECT INFORMATION: The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is a part of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, a division of the National Park Service. Todd Croteau, HAER Architect, coordinates the Maritime Program. Jet

¹ Information from U.S. Coast Guard, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/weblightships/lv83.html>, accessed March 2005. Quote from James Delgado, "Lightship No. 83," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Maritime Heritage of the United States NHL Study-Large Vessels, July 1988, statement of significance.

Lowe, HAER Photographer, produced the large format photography. Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, compiled the data pages in 2005.

HISTORY OF LIGHTSHIP No. 83

In 1903, Congress appropriated money to the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment for the construction of new lightships. New York Shipbuilding Company of Camden, New Jersey, built Lightship No. 83 as part of this appropriation. She was launched in 1904. The ship, along with Lightship No. 76 (designated as a relief vessel), steamed around Cape Horn to San Francisco, arriving in 1905. On June 28, 1905, Lightship No. 83 entered duty at Blunts Reef, located “185 miles north of San Francisco off Cape Mendocino and close to the entrance to the busy harbor of Eureka on Humboldt Bay.”² Lightship No. 100, the first of a new class of diesel electric lightships replaced her at Blunts Reef in 1930. Lightship No. 83 then transferred to San Francisco, replacing the retired Lightship No. 70.

In 1942, Lightship No. 83 entered military service and underwent some modifications. Painted gray, with guns installed on her foredeck, bridge and stern and the crews’ quarters enlarged to forty, she served as a patrol and guard boat in the Golden Gate area. At the end of World War II, Lightship No. 83 returned to her pre-war duties. In 1951, WAL 612 replaced Lightship No. 83, so she was sent north as a relief ship for other stationed lightships. RELIEF, as she was then designated, substituted when the permanent lightships went off duty for maintenance. As such, she served as the lightship on the Swiftsure Bank at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Umatilla Reef, and the Columbian River entrance. She not only was the guide for the commercial and cruise ships entering and leaving the Pacific Ocean, but also served as the turning mark for the prestigious annual international Swiftsure yacht race.

DESCRIPTION AND ALTERATIONS³

Lightship No. 83 has a double-riveted hull and a 52.9' foremast and 53.2' mainmast. The masts originally had three sperm-whale oil-burning lamps mounted on them. In 1908, kerosene lights were installed, followed by electric in 1915. Finally, in the late 1930s, a “1,000-watt light in a

² Degado, 8-4.

³ For a complete description of Lightship No. 83 as it existed in 1988, see Delgado.

375-mm cut glass 15,000-candlepower lens (then the standard optic for lightships) was installed atop each mast.”⁴ When first built, “a 380-h.p. compound reciprocating marine steam engine and two tubular coal-fired boilers” powered the single screw. In the 1930s, diesel-fired Babcock and Wilcox boilers replaced the coal ones. Significantly, “unlike other lightships converted fully to diesel or diesel electric, No. 83 remained a steamship, with her original steam engines and auxiliary steam machinery.”⁵ Below deck in the forecastle was the steam pump brake windlass, Model #6 from the Hyde Windlass Company. The windlass hoisted the 3-ton mushroom anchor that kept the ship positioned at its station.

While Lightship No. 83 retains an extremely high degree of integrity, it has undergone various modifications and alterations to its equipment during its operational history. In 1906, she had a submarine bell signal installed (which was discontinued in 1930) as well as a submersible mooring buoy. A radio and radio beacon were added in 1918 and 1922 respectively. A steam diaphragm horn replaced the 12" steam chime whistle fog signal in 1932, and two years later, an air diaphone replaced the whistle. However, the original 1,000 pound bell remained as a backup. A pilothouse with master’s cabin and a radio shack replaced the original forward lamp-trimmer cabin, rendered obsolete with upgrades to the lanterns, in 1934. Finally, in 1945, Lightship No. 83 was outfitted with detection radar.⁶

CHRONOLOGY⁷

1905:	Began service at Blunts Reef, California (until 1930)
1906, 1907:	Blown off course six times due to weather
1910:	Rammed by steam schooner DEL NORTE and went to San Francisco for repairs
1916:	Hosted 155 survivors from coastal steamer BEAR
1930:	Replaced by diesel electric Lightship No. 100 and transferred to San Francisco
	(until 1942)
1939:	Redesignated WAL 508 when the U.S. Coast Guard took over the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment

⁴ Delgado, 7-2.

⁵ Delgado, 7-3.

⁶ Information from U.S. Coast Guard, <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/weblightships/lv83.html>, accessed March 2005.

⁷ Compiled from U.S. Coast Guard website; Northwest Seaport website, <http://www.nwseaport.org/swiftsure.html>, accessed March 2005; Delgado.

1942: Entered military service as a patrol and guard boat (until 1945)
1945: Returned to civilian service and stationed in San Francisco (until 1951)
1951: Replaced by WAL 612 and transferred north as a relief lightship on West Coast, redesignated RELIEF (until 1960)
1960: Decommissioned on July 18
1969: Purchased by Save Our Ships, which later became Northwest Seaport, Inc.
1975: Listed on the National Register of Historic Places
1989: Declared a National Historic Landmark

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Delgado, James. "Lightship No. 83." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Maritime Heritage of the United States NHL Study--Large Vessels." July 1988.

Northwest Seaport website, <http://www.nwseaport.org/swiftsure.html>, accessed March 2005.

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